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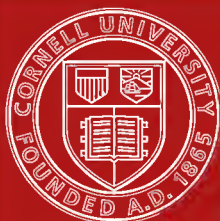
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Thoreau: a glimpse.



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HENRY D. THOREAU

THOREAU:

A Glimpse

BY

SAMUEL ARTHUR JONES

"To be a voice outside the State, speaking to mankind or to the Future, perhaps shaking the actual State to pieces in doing so, one man will suffice."



CONCORD, MASS.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

It was while engaged in collecting Carlyleana that the writer of the Glimpse came upon Thoreau's impassioned "Plea For Captain John Brown," wounded and in prison. The spark found the tinder ready, and the fire then kindled is burning yet.

The reading of a certain Life of Thoreau raised doubts that could be solved only in Concord, and a pilgrimage thither was made in the summer of 1890. Many venerable residents were still living who had known the Thoreau family as only neighbors can, and their testimony, freely and graciously given, dispelled every disturbing doubt and has left a radiance in the memory that only death can dim.

I found a genial guide who took me to Thoreau's sylvan haunts and thereby made the pilgrimage a dream of delight; and from that day began a quest that ended only when he "went over to the majority." To many and many a one whom Thoreau's life has touched to finer issues "old Concord" can never again be to them the Concord of which "Fred" is so large a part in sunny recollections thereof.

It is a pious duty to his memory to correct the errors of fact that were repeated and reported in the first

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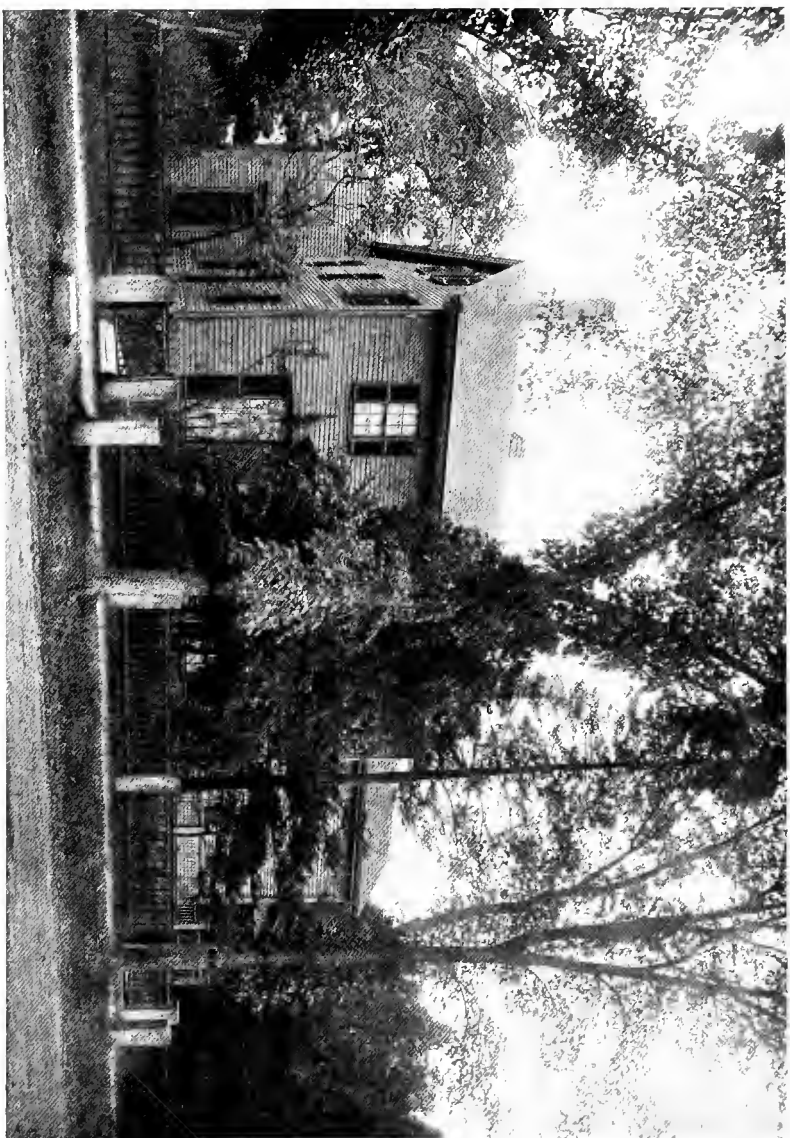
edition of the *Glimpse*: corrections that are enabled by the faithful, untiring, and unpretentious services of the late Alfred W. Hosmer. Indeed those who have read Mr. Henry S. Salt's "*Life of Thoreau*" can little know how much that sympathetic record is indebted for reliable material to Mr. Hosmer's indefatigable zeal.

It had long been purposed to reproduce the privately printed *Glimpse* of 1890, but what Mazzini used to call "the cares of bread" were inexorable,—and now he whose labors have weeded out the tares of error has gone where they no longer see as in a glass darkly. O Friend, Hail and Farewell!

S. A. J.

June, 1903.

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THE THOREAU HOUSE.

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His best biographer says that "on the spot where Thoreau lived at Walden there is now a cairn of stones, yearly visited by hundreds, and growing in height as each friend of his muse adds a stone from the shore of the fair water he loved so well." There is another monument, also growing in height, the initial contribution by Emerson, the very latest from the hand of John Burroughs. Emerson's is a votive offering—cypress and rosemary—lovingly laid on Thoreau's grave more than a quarter of a century ago; and yet today as fresh as if the chaplet had been plucked in Paradise from the Tree of Life.

Running down the long and growing list of contributors, we find those who had known Thoreau in the flesh and they who have studied him in his books. If from all these sketches it were possible to make a photographic "composite," I much doubt if the Recording Angel could recognize the man by the picture.

The most subtle "Critical Essay" gives only the measure of its writer—he betrays his own limitations—and, at its best, the most searching study of a dead

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author's "Life, Character, and Opinions" is only a post-mortem examination. The spirit eludes ; the felicitous last word is still to be said. It is this expectancy that gives to the proper study of an author's life its special charm of "lastingness". By "proper study" I mean such a breadth of research as includes all collateral reading, so that, at last, you shall have rambled along the many rivulets which united make the resulting river of fact. But no author, living or dead, is ever known to his contemporaries. On the thirteenth of this month "gruff Sam Johnson" will have been dead one hundred and five years, yet we know absolutely more of him than was possible even to Boswell : thanks to Croker, Napier, and Dr. Birbeck Hill.

If, however, you are a proper student the discrepancies and contradictions of criticism will send you from the critics to the author himself ; and that result I take to be about the happiest outcome of all criticism — it certainly will be in Thoreau's case.

Another observable feature of the critical function is the endeavor to account for an author by means of such factors as heredity, environment, and the "Zeit-Geist" — a certain "Spirit of the Age" that somehow manages to mould a Luther and manufacture a Tetzels by the same twist of the wrist ; as if Nature threw dice and loaded them on occasion ! In Thoreau's instance I feel obliged to eliminate largely the influence

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of heredity. Considering his ancestry, Thoreau is quite a psychological surprise. A maternal grandfather turned from expounding the laws of God to confounding those of the Commonwealth — dropped Theology and took up Law. A maternal uncle was a "character" — a free-and-easy, unstarched rambler who, with little "property," no family, an utter indifference to "public opinion," took life as easily as his famous nephew did earnestly. There was too much of him for a "loafer" and not enough for a philosopher. Thoreau's father was "a small and unobtrusive man, grave and silent, but inwardly cheerful and social, and noted for 'minding his own business'." Thoreau's mother, according to a credible witness,

"Waa one of the most unceasing talkers in Concord. Her gift of speech was proverbial, and wherever she was, the conversation fell largely to her share.

"She was also subject to sharp and sudden flashes of gossip and malice, which never quite amounted to ill-nature, but greatly provoked the prim and commonplace that she so often came in contact with."

If her "flashes" ever took the shape of "sheet-lightning," we can but hope that Thoreau père was a non-conductor !

So much for heredity ; but it were unjust to leave the Thoreau family in the shadow of such a picture. Says one who had lived with them :

"The atmosphere of earnest purpose which pervaded the great movement for the emancipation of the slaves, gave to the Thoreau

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family an elevation of character which was ever afterwards perceptible, and imparted an air of dignity to the trivial details of life. The children of the house, there were four of them, as they grew up all became school-teachers, and each displayed peculiar gifts in that profession. But they were all something more than teachers, and becoming enlisted early in the anti-slavery cause or in that broader service of humanity which 'plain living and high thinking' imply, they gradually withdrew from that occupation, — declining the opportunities by which other young persons, situated as they were, rise to worldly success, and devoting themselves, within limits somewhat narrow to the pursuit of lofty ideals. * * * To meet one of the Thoreaus was not the same as to encounter any other person who might happen to cross your path. Life to them was something more than a parade of pretensions, a conflict of ambition, or an incessant scramble for the common objects of desire. * * * Without wealth, or power, or social prominence, they still held a rank of their own, in scrupulous independence, and with qualities that put condescension out of the question."

That "great movement for the emancipation of the slaves" was somewhat extensive. In the year 1835 there were in the United States not less than two thousand Anti-Slavery Societies, and you can imagine what a membership that implies! How many families, think you, did "the atmosphere of earnest purpose" thus transfigure? We are to remember that this very "atmosphere" could put nothing into the Thoreau family; it could only develop that which was already there. It did not "give them" an elevation of character, — it simply supplied the conditions that revealed their moral altitude. There were not a few in those days — and all too many of them clergymen — whom that very "movement", despite the "atmosphere of earnest pur-

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pose," sank lower than the common sewers. It was an asphyxiating atmosphere to Things ; it was fatal to all two-legged invertebrates : it was respirable only by true manhood ; and those Thoreaus thrived in it, shot up towards Heaven, and their altitude "was ever afterwards perceptible."

Thoreau's immediate environment was severely "Transcendental", as he was born, lived, and died in Concord ; and there of course Emerson was the "deus ex machina"—quite an addition to any environment. Thoreau enjoyed an unusual intimacy with Emerson, having lived for quite a while in his family ; and this I presume gave Mr. Lowell the opportunity to call Thoreau "a pistillate plant kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen." It seems to me as if Lowell gets on all fours whenever he mentions Emerson ; he always writes of him as if all the gods of Olympus had put on clean linen when Emerson was moulded — an admiration that dwindles into adulation.

It was fortunate for Lydia Maria Childs that she did not live in Concord, or some of her own ideas would have been ascribed to "Emersonian pollen" floating around to the detriment of other people's originality. You remember the famous couplet,—

"And, striving to be man, the worm
Mounts through all the spires of form."

It is the keystone of Conway's claim that Emerson, not Darwin, first broached the idea of evolution. Well, this couplet first appears in the second edition of Emerson's "Nature", published in 1849. If you should read Mrs. Child's "Letters from New York, First Series" — a somewhat notable book in its day — possibly you may find in Letter XXVI, written in September, 1842 and published in 1843, the pollen that "kindled to fruitage" the Emersonian idea. Emerson's son has nobly said,—"The charge of imitating Emerson, too often made against Thoreau, is idle and untenable, though unfortunately it has received some degree of sanction in high quarters. * * * Thoreau was incapable of conscious imitation. His faults, if any, lay in exactly the other direction." A pronouncement which speaks volumes for the sagacity and critical insight of Dr. Edward Waldo Emerson.

The same well-qualified authority also gives us this statement, namely: "The history of Mr. Emerson's first acquaintance with Mr. Thoreau is this: When the former was delivering a new lecture in Concord, Miss Helen Thoreau said to Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Emerson's sister, 'There is a thought almost identical with that in Henry's journal,' which she soon after brought to Mrs. Brown. The latter carried it to Mr. Emerson, who was interested, and asked her to bring this youth to see him. She did, and thus began a relation that

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lasted all their lives of strong respect and even affection, but of a Roman character."

So far as concerns environment, if Thoreau got a stimulus from it he was also a stimulus in it. As diamond cuts diamond, so the attrition of mind against mind brings out the facets of character, and the process that shaped Thoreau also gave shape to others.

How far was Thoreau influenced by the "Zeit-Geist?" It was indeed a potent "Geist." Emerson writes of it to Carlyle, —

"We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a new Community in his waistcoat pocket. I am gently mad myself, and am resolved to live cleanly".

It is believed that Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus" had a hand in the raising of that Geist; and it was a spirit that would not be laid by bell and candle. Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" put a new leaven into the minds of men, and the fermenting process was called "Transcendentalism." Germany had it, France had it, and New England had it in the superlative degree. O. B. Frothingham, its best historian says, — "New England furnished the only plot of ground on the planet, where the transcendental philosophy had a chance to show what it was and what it proposed." The Yankee, as usual, outdid "all creation!"

A dozen years ago a semi-clerical mountebank said in a public lecture: "What is Transcendentalism?"

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You will not suspect me of possessing the mood of that acute teacher, who, on the deck of a Mississippi steamer, was asked this question, and replied, 'See the holes made in the bank yonder by the swallows. Take away the bank and leave the holes, and this is Transcendentalism'." This is just the kitchen wit of a Cook. The very tornado that prostrates the lordly oak also fills the air with flying straws and the refuse of the roadside; just so this storm of transcendental thought caught up both strong men and weak, and thus it got both a sublime aspect and a ludicrous. From one point of view you can discover such whimsical antics as would make an angel weep; and from another you can see some of the noblest of our race striving to scale Heaven by the very ladder that Jacob saw in his dream. That they could not take the whole world with them is the chief failure of Transcendentalism — and only a sodden fool can laugh at that.

In the Communities to which the Transcendental thought gave rise — and these bankrupted the generous souls who gave their all to found them — one thing is noticeable, namely, they banded themselves together to help one another to that higher life for which they yearned.

Thoreau could easily have joined Ripley's Community at Brook Farm or Alcott's at Fruitlands. He did neither. He built his shanty at Walden and went

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there ALONE. Here was the sanity of genius recognizing the divine behest,—“Work Out Your Own Salvation !”

Lowell is pleased to regard this Walden episode as a pastoral masquerade, a “Transcendentalist” theatricality, a sham. Dr. Garnett thinks Lowell’s critical essay “half reveals a suspicion that the apostle of Nature may have been something of a charlatan.” Lowell had arraigned the dead-and-buried Thoreau in this wise :

“His shanty-life was a mere impossibility, so far as his own conception of it goes, as an entire independency of mankind. The tub of Diogenes had a sounder bottom. Thoreau’s experiment actually presupposes all that complicated civilization which it theoretically abjured. He squats on another man’s land; he borrows an axe; his boards, his nails, his bricks, his mortar, his books, his lamp, his fish-hooks, his plough, his hoe, all turn state’s evidence against him as an accomplice in the sin of that artificial civilization which rendered it possible that such a person as Henry D. Thoreau should exist at all.”

This is perhaps the most explicit indictment that has been filed against Thoreau. It is a misconception: it has in it traces of even a malignant misconception,—the wish being father to the thought. I seriously question if any literature contains a more pitiful ineptitude. Emerson says, “we descend to meet.” I think it would hold good if Thoreau had an appointment with his critic. In depicting Thoreau, Lowell looked down and saw the shadow of him in a mud-puddle :

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he should have looked up at the man and had the azure heavens for a background.

Thoreau had proved himself a man of principles and of convictions, a man who had found some things on which he not only could stand, but **MUST** : and all this before he had borrowed Alcott's axe to cut the sills of his Walden shanty. Lowell should have remembered this ; for while he could sing his stinging stanzas in the slave's behalf, Thoreau had spoken the words that blistered where they touched. Hear him on the conduct of certain newspapers, when slavery stained the sunlight that fell on the monument at Concord Bridge :

"Could slavery suggest a more complete servility than some of these journals exhibit? Is there any dust which their conduct does not lick and make still fouler with its slime? I do not know whether the Boston Herald is still in existence, but I remember to have seen it about the streets when Simms was carried off. Did it not act its part well—serve its master faithfully? How could it have gone lower on its belly? * * * When I have taken up this paper with my cuffs turned up, I have heard the gurgling of the common sewer in its every column."

He also said in the same address,

"I would remind my countrymen that they are to be men first, and Americans only at a late and convenient hour. No matter how valuable the law may be to protect property, even to keep soul and body together, if it do not keep you and humanity together."

One other instance, still from the same address. A slave, Anthony Burns, had been apprehended in Massachusetts and the most intense excitement prevailed. The Commissioner, Mr. Edward G. Loring, was called

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by the State to examine the law and decide if the slave must be given up. Thoreau said,

"Massachusetts sat waiting Mr. Loring's decision, as if that could in any way affect her own criminality. Her crime, the most conspicuous and fatal crime of all, was permitting him to be the umpire in such a case. It was really the trial of Massachusetts. Every moment that she hesitated to set this man free, every moment that she now hesitates to atone for her crime, she is convicted. The Commissioner on her case is God; not Edward G. God, but simple God."

Who shall say that even in such audacity there is not righteousness? If the Recording Angel had to write it down, who does not believe that it also dropped a tear to blot it out? But pray tell me what would that pitying angel do with this utterance:

"It was while in the Lower House of Congress that Franklin Pierce took that stand on the slavery question from which he has never since swerved by a hair's breadth. He fully recognized, by his votes and his voice, the rights pledged to the South by the Constitution. This, at the period when he declared himself, was an easy thing to do. But when it became more difficult, when the first imperceptible murmur of agitation had grown almost to a convulsion, his course was still the same. Nor did he ever shun the obloquy that sometimes threatened to pursue the Northern man who dared to love that great and sacred reality—his whole united country—better than the mistiness of a philanthropic theory."

Before Heaven's Chancery I would rather be the hot-blooded Thoreau than the author of the "Life of Franklin Pierce". Well and truly did Thoreau say, "What is wanted is not men of policy, but men of probity,—who recognize a higher law than the Constitution or the decision of the

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majority. The fate of the country does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot box, but on the kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning."

When voting is only a matter of counting noses, when it becomes a game in which Judas Iscariot is as "strong" as Jesus Christ—as Carlyle declared—Thoreau disclaimed the ballot. He repudiated his allegiance to the Commonwealth and refused to pay taxes that were used to uphold slavery. He was put in jail. His friend, Mr. Emerson, learned of his arrest and hastened to see him. He stood before the cell door and asked, "Henry, why are you here?" and from the cell came the suggestive reply: "Why are you NOT here?"

Of this event in Thoreau's life John Burroughs says, "His carrying his opposition to the State to the point of allowing himself to be put in jail rather than pay a paltry tax, savors a little bit of the grotesque and the melodramatic." It has been already affirmed in your hearing that "the most subtle critical essay" which aims to sum up a man gives only the measure of its writer; he betrays his own limitations.

John Hampden refused to pay a "paltry tax" of twenty shillings "Ship money." That is not grotesque and melodramatic," but tragic and sublime because in the end a king's head dropped from his shoulders "in the open street before Whitehall."

Considering their respective worldly goods, John

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Hampden's twenty shillings sterling was the paltrier tax. But the PRINCIPLE (which a President's "advertising agent" failed to discern)! Tried by results that the world takes note of, one resistance decapitated a man; in the ultimate, the other enfranchised six million slaves, and in a manner neither "grotesque nor melo-dramatic" — to any other than advertising agents! Some weak-backed friend, mayhap of the advertising agent species, ever after paid Thoreau's taxes and so his one night's imprisonment "savors a little bit of the grotesque and melodramatic" — but what if the "salt" in the man had lost its savor? All advertising agents whatsoever will do well to consider that!

Hampden's recalcitration ushered in a tragedy. Because of non-payment? Because the Hampdens and Pymys and Fairfaxes and Cromwells — not being of advertising agent limitations — said, "resistance to tyrants is obedience to God." — and the great heart of England throbbed its Amen!

Thoreau could live up to a conviction though to do it were a minority of one with the universe against it. Burroughs sees only a "paltry tax" — so different the measure of men. And yet, look at the contradictions of these same "critics," for this identical John Burroughs, in the same essay, says of this very Thoreau, "His devotion to principle, to the ideal was absolute; it was like that of the Hindu to his idol. If it devoured

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him or crushed him — what business was that of his? There was no conceivable failure in adherence to principle." Yet such "devotion" can become "grotesque and melodramatic" on occasion! Such are the paper flowers of rhetoric.

On the 30th of October, 1859, Thoreau spoke in defense of John Brown, when to do that required a moral backbone whose every vertebra was as solid as the everlasting hills. It is an unequivocal endorsement of Brown in the face of the most overwhelming public opinion — a deprecatory murmur even among anti-slavery men. Emerson says, "Before the first friendly word had been spoken for Captain John Brown, after the arrest, Thoreau sent notices to most houses in Concord that he would speak in a public hall on the condition and character of John Brown, on Sunday evening, and invited all people to come. The Republican Committee, the Abolitionist Committee, sent him word that it was premature and unadvisable. He replied "I did not send to you for advice, but to announce that I am to speak."

Burroughs calls this event "the most significant act of his life. It clinches him: it makes the colors fast. We know he means what he says after that . . . It shows what thoughts he fed his soul on, what school he had schooled himself in, what his devotion meant." If virtue were only contagious and Thoreau's speech

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were read in our churches from time to time it might change the relative value of Jesus and Judas at the polls!

James Russell Lowell has written that Thoreau "looked with utter contempt on the august drama of destiny of which his country was the scene, and on which the curtain had already arisen" . . . an awful charge to make over a dead man's grave.

The name of HENRY D. THOREAU does not appear on the roster or on the muster-roll of any Massachusetts regiment because, while he lived, the war was only for the preservation of a Union that sanctioned Slavery, and occasion would make him a slave-hunter. Before the Emancipation Proclamation was written, Thoreau was in his grave; Lowell's relatives went to death in that "august drama of destiny," but Lowell lives—in the capacity of a Massachusetts "mugwump." Such is the difference between carbonate of lime and cartilage in a man's backbone.

I have dwelt at this length on Thoreau as an abolitionist in order to show him unswervingly steadfast to principle, and to correct an unrighteous aspersion. I think the time well spent, although it makes my remaining moments too few for an adequate glance at Thoreau as a "loafer" a loafer; "by Divine right," an inspired loafer.

Novalis called Spinoza a "God-intoxicated man";

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Thoreau was Nature-intoxicated. "If he waked up from a trance in a Concord swamp, he could tell by the plants what time of the year it was within two days." His knowledge of nature was microscopic; trees, plants, animals, birds, fishes, all told him their secrets, almost unasked,—and he lived chiefly amongst them. In an essay entitled "Life without Principle" he says: "To have done anything by which you earned money **MERELY**, is to have been idle or worse."

He was a good gardener, an excellent surveyor, unusually handy with tools; said he had "as many trades as fingers;" was also college bred, and yet with all this equipment he devoutly believed that the worst use you could put a man to was to — hang him? No; set him to "Making Money."

He proved that a man could earn enough in six weeks to support him a year — did so support himself, for he lived in his shanty at Walden Pond on some fifteen dollars a year. He says of that episode in his life, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear, nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-

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like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world : or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account in my next excursion."

"Able to give a true account of it in my Next excursion" — that journey made with closed eyes and folded hands !

All around him was a surging humanity, toiling, sweating, and groaning in travail, as if "resignation" to life were necessary ; and yet he said, "I am convinced that to maintain oneself on this earth is not a hardship, but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely ; as the pursuits of simpler nations are still the sports of the more artificial."

"The essential facts of life" — the pearl of great price — were an ever-present and a solemn reality to Thoreau. The thought of them filled him with "a feeling of awfulness" just as it did John Woolman, and George Fox, and Mohammed, and Him of Nazareth. I think it must have been some day when these essential facts had gotten obscured in the murky mist arising from the Slough of Despond that he wrote : "It is hard to be a good citizen of the world in any great sense ; but if we do render no interest or increase to

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mankind out of that talent God gave us, we can at least preserve the principal unimpaired."

This is he of whom Lowell said, "Did his life seem a selfish one, he condemns doing good as one of the weakest of superstitions" -- and he the while sweating in the arena, despairing of "interest or increase," and yet girding up his loins to "preserve the principal unimpaired."

Says Moncure D. Conway, "Emerson took me to see Thoreau, and I remember that he asked me what we were studying at Divinity College. I answered, 'The Scriptures.' "Which?" he asked. I was puzzled until Emerson said, 'I fear you will find our Thoreau a sad Pagan.' " Thoreau recognized several Bibles in which men were gasping for God in atmospheres more or less respirable. He did not seek the solution of the great secret in printed Bibles. Men had sought it there for thousands of years: that they had found it there was a postulate contradicted by their conduct of life. He contrasts men and animals, and finds a large balance in favor of the brute. He says, "I must receive my life as passively as the willow leaf that flutters over the brook. I must not be for myself, but for God's work, and that is always good. I will wait the breezes patiently, and grow as they determine. My fate cannot but be grand so. We may live the life of a plant or an animal without living an animal life. The

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constant and universal content of the animal comes of resting quietly in God's palm."

The animal is wiser than man, he concludes ; and at once a great suspicion dawns upon his mind : the animal lives nearer to Nature, lives more in accord with her, more in obedience to her, and it is through Nature — God's Bible — that the Creator reveals himself to the creature. A Revelation in Nature : all earnest souls seek that ! That much-misunderstood Walt Whitman writes, "While I cannot understand it or argue it out, I fully believe in a clue and purpose in Nature, entire and several ; and invisible spiritual results, just as real and definite as the visible, eventuate all concrete life and all materialism through time."

From that supreme moment onward, to this man Thoreau every created thing was a divine message from its Maker and his. Oh, if he could but catch the meaning of the message or of the messenger ! Hence his mystical allegory : "I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they responded to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind the cloud, and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves." Alas for us all ! they had lost them,

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even as we have : for what is the hound but the divine scent that finds the trail : what the bay horse but sagacity and strength to carry us in pursuit ; what the turtle-dove but innocence to secure us the Divine protection ? And we have lost them all. Are we still on the trail ? Thoreau kept there "till he disappeared behind the cloud."

The vision of "the constant and universal content of the animal" was Thoreau's apocalypse, and from that moment he put his ear to the great heart of Nature as lovingly as a child lays its head on its mother's breast. He wrote in his journal on the 31st of March, 1852 (just ten years before he was translated), "The song-sparrow and the transient fox-colored sparrow, have they brought me no message this year ? Is not the coming of the fox-sparrow something more earnest and significant than I have dreamed of ? Have I heard what this tiny messenger has to say while it flits from tree to tree ? God did not make this world in jest, no, nor in indifference. These migratory swallows all bear messages that concern my life. I do not pluck the fruits in their season. I see that the sparrow cheeps and flits, and sings adequately to the great design of the universe, that man does not communicate with it, understand its language, because he is not at one with it." I suppose it was considering the respective messages they brought that led him to rank

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the D. D's below the Chick-a-de-dees — one preaches for a stipend, the other brings word from Heaven. The "practical man" can see nothing in this sentimental "twaddle about sparrows": the "practical man" is too often the Devil's "right bower" for that very reason. An old Book, somewhat obsolete now-a-days, but in precious esteem with aged people, says :

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings ? and not one of them is forgotten of God."

I notice many sparrows in this little leafy town of ours ; I find them about our streets in the dead of the harshest winter ; I do not learn that any of them has ever made application to the overseer of the poor — they "rest quietly in God's palm." Is there no "message" in this ?

I crave your patience for one more quotation which may, or may not, have meaning for you :

"The ultimate expression or fruit of any created thing is a fine effluence which only the most ingenuous worshiper perceives at a reverent distance from its surface even. The cause and effect are equally evanescent and intangible, and the former must be investigated with the same reverence with which the latter is perceived. Science is often like the grub which, though it may have nestled in the germ of a plant, has merely blighted or consumed it, never truly tasted it. The rude and ignorant finger is probing in the rind still, for in this case, the angles of incidence and exidence are equal, and the essence is as far on the other side of the surface or matter, as reverence detains the worshiper on this, and only reverence can find out this angle instinctively. Shall we presume to alter the angle at which God chooses to be worshipped ?"

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This "fine effluence" is that "invisible spiritual result" for which Thoreau hungered and thirsted and ceaselessly sought, though he had lost hound, horse and turtle-dove. Sir Galahad sought the Holy Grail : the Concord "loafer" had a higher quest.

If I have attained my highest expectation, this glimpse of Thoreau will leave you wholly unsatisfied. Can you be persuaded to turn from the contemplation of such sacerdotal scarecrows as "Robert Elsmere," and "John Ward" to read the writings of a rare man, a flesh-and-blood reality, whose whole life was a strenuous endeavor to apprehend — lay hold of — eternity? His books contain so much that will "find" you, as Coleridge says. Let me give you a thought of his that comes home most touchingly to those of us who are "ayont" the fifties. He says, "The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, or, perchance, a palace or temple on the earth, and at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a wood-shed with them." (My white-haired friend, how is it ?) And yet he finely reproaches us for being content with a "wood-shed. "If," he says, "you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost : that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." Aye, the boulders of truths eternal.

Of any earnest man he declares, "In proportion as

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he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness." Thus grandly doth he "justify the ways of God to man." He says with ever increasing emphasis, "If life is with us a soul-wearying struggle, the fault is in us : we are violating those laws of the universe which, unbroken, make heavenly harmony."

Emerson called this man "a sad pagan," and there is deep meaning in the word spoken in jest, for, with the Elizabethan writers, "sad" and "serious" were synonyms — and a serious "pagan" Thoreau most surely was. The only other "pagan," known to me, equally serious in the consideration of that mystery we call "Life," is Marcus Aurelius.

Looking beyond the stars on a cloudless night we can easily imagine them walking hand in hand in fields of amaranth and asphodel.



HOME OF HENRY D. THOREAU AT WALDEN POND

THOREAU'S INHERITANCE

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[The Glimpse was written from a fervid impulse rather than adequate knowledge: and, worse, the light that led astray was not "from Heaven": at least, if many Concord folk are to be believed — and of a certainty they are.

In a certain university town the little church on the corner was the first to open friendly arms to the stranger-student regardless of the quality of his garments, and thither the students, the real students, flocked. For them a busy country doctor wrote of the discovery he had made so late in his own life: that of a Man!

At that day all that was accessible to him was the semi-hysterical rhapsody, "Thoreau. The Poet-Naturalist," the quasi "Life" by H. A. Page, and a certain biography written by one of Thoreau's townsmen. Then the writer of the Glimpse could take the Concordian biographer at his own word: today he is not capable of such an audacity. Nevertheless he was sorely perplexed in his endeavors to reconcile the high moral and ethical altitude of the Thoreau children with the character and condition of the household in which they were reared: a snuffy nobody for a father and a gossip-mongering mother, who was reinforced by a relay of aunts of the like species! There was nothing for such dubiety save a visit to Concord. That visit was made, and ever since to that visitor biographies are like veal pies, — "all very well when you know the man that makes them."

But the worst "break" in the Glimpse was corrected by a writer in "The Inlander" some two years afterward; and his paper is appended as correcting the following mis-statement:

"In Thoreau's instance I feel obliged to eliminate the influence of heredity. Considering his ancestry, Thoreau is quite a psychological surprise."

After reading "Thoreau's Inheritance" the "surprise" took an entirely new shape. Editor.]

THOREAU'S shanty-life at Walden is the episode by which he is chiefly known and from which he is generally misunderstood. That really serious and far-reaching experiment in "plain living and high thinking" is considered a transcendental *fête champêtre* or as one of the various freaks of the disciples of "The Newness." It was unfavorably judged by Lowell, whose criticism of Thoreau's life and aims has given the cue to that respectable majority who think by proxy when they think at all. In Lowell's opinion, Thoreau at Walden was masquerading as a "hermit" whose whole environment proclaimed him a pretence; and even the genial genius who presides "over the teacups" mentions him as "the Robinson Crusoe of Walden pond, who carried out a school-boy whim to its full proportions." The atmosphere in which alone a Lowell and a Holmes could burst into blossom would only stifle a Thoreau, and men so different can never interpret, much less comprehend, each other.

Thoreau's adventure at Walden was a crucial experiment in the science and art of living; an earnest grappling with the mysteries that vex and perplex this earthly existence. He had concluded that "the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation," and in the very soul of him he believed that such lives impugn

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the wisdom, the justice, and the compassion of the Divine Arbiter. Moreover, he had found that a man who was willing to live sanely, "close to the bone, where life is sweetest," could earn by six weeks' labor sufficient to support him for the remainder of the year. The richest of the Concord farmers were not doing so well as that; they were "so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them." Yet these very fruits — an intercourse and intimacy with Nature, whose countless delights made life one ceaseless round of rapture — were his continual harvest, spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Thoreau was happily constituted; he was strong and alert; a tireless pedestrian, and endowed with such a refinement of the special senses as made him a marvel to his intimates. His sight was almost microscopical; his scent so acute that he detected a peculiar odor coming from such inhabited houses as he happened to pass at night, and he heard rapturous harmonies in the vibrations of a wind-shaken telegraph wire. He revelled in the luxury of these gifts and became the epicure of Nature. Now it was the austere flavor of a wild apple from his well-stored pockets or that of some simple bark which he stripped as he walked; then it was the perfume of the clethra or the fern as he strode through them on his daily ramble; again it

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was the song of the birds, which he was so skillful in translating into syllabic similitudes ; and always there was the painted landscape of the varied year, the gilded sunsets and the calm night's silvered clouds. Did HE make all these for the deaf and the blind ! Did HE tempt the children of men with these ineffable visions and then so order their lives that they should have "no time" to enjoy them ! It is what the fool hath said in his heart : they are wide-spread as the earth, free as the air, and to drink in their delights is verily "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." Thoreau recognized his inheritance and entered upon it with joy.

But his inheritance included also the endowment of heredity : a potent factor which has not yet had just and due consideration from any of his biographers.

A gentleman who attended the school kept by the Thoreau brothers once wrote to me : "Henry Thoreau was not a superior scion upon an inferior stock, neither was he begotten by a North-west wind, as many have supposed. There were good and sufficient reasons for the Thoreau childrens' love of, and marked taste for, Botany and Natural History. John Thoreau and his wife were to be seen, year after year, enjoying the pleasures of nature, in their various seasons, on the banks of the Assabet, at Fairhaven, Lee's Hill, Walden and elsewhere ; and this too without neglecting the

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various duties of their humble sphere. Indeed, such was Mrs. Thoreau's passion for these rambles that one of her children narrowly escaped being born in a favorite haunt on Lee's Hill.

"The father was a very cautious and secretive man, a close observer, methodical and deliberate in action, and he produced excellent results. His marbled paper and his pencils were the best in the market, while his stove polish and his plumbago for electrotyping have never, to my knowledge, been excelled. He was a French gentleman rather than a 'Yankee,' and once having his confidence, you had a very shrewd and companionable friend to commune with. Then, when there were no unauthorized listeners about, the otherwise quiet man, who had such a faculty for 'minding his own business,' would sit with you by the stove in his little shop and chat most delightfully.

"When I recollect, too, what an exacting woman his excellent wife was, and that he fully met her inflexible demands, I can by no means regard him as the mediocre 'plodder' depicted by one of his famous son's biographers. No; the tree is known by its fruits, and John Thoreau begot brains of a high order, with sound, healthy bodies to go with them; and I feel certain that his highest earthly aspirations were realized in his children."

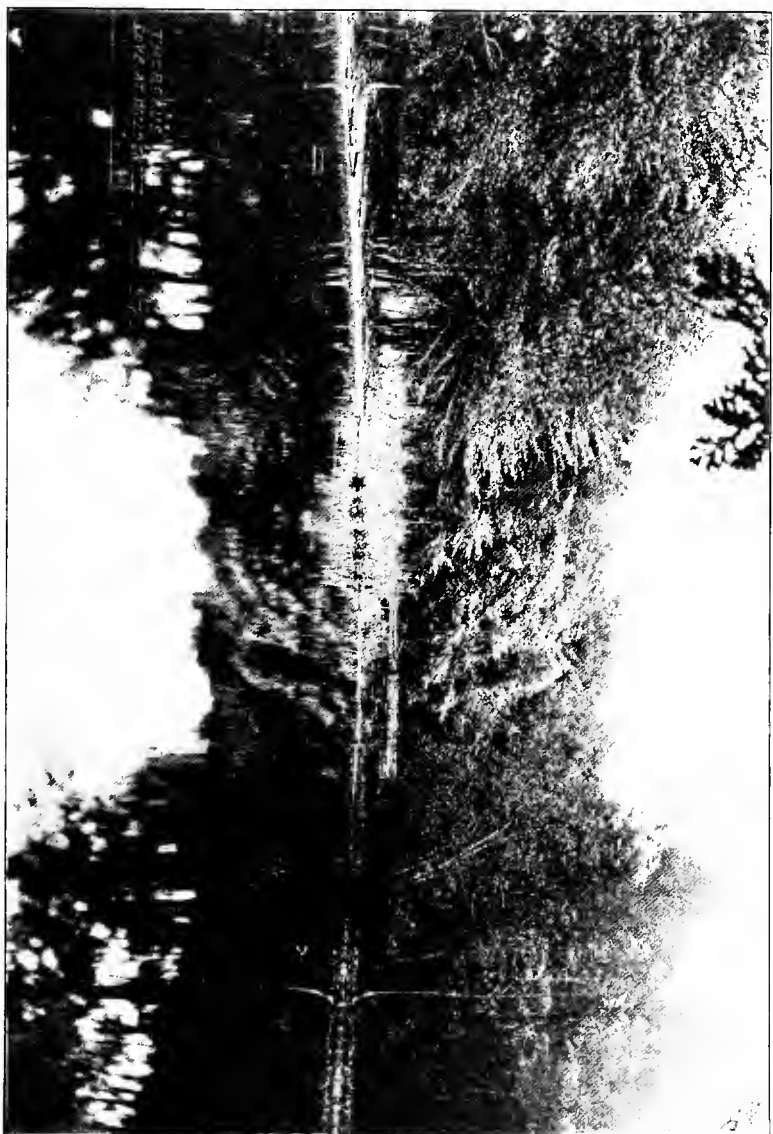
Nor was this sterling man yoked with an unworthy

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helpmate, despite the biographer who represents her as a gossip-monger prompt to "take her share in the village bickerings." This ascription, so sadly at variance with the sweet charity that spares the dead, was sharply contradicted by a lady friend of Mrs. Thoreau in the Boston "Daily Advertiser," but, alas! the ephemeral newspaper perishes with the day that brought it forth, while the printed book lives on and

"Like a tall bully, lifts its head and lies."

One biographer bears glowing testimony to the high moral altitude of the Thoreau children, but quite forgets to explain how they could possibly attain to such a lofty ethical grandeur in the atmosphere of a home that was moulded and managed by a gossip-loving mother. Such a discrepancy should not be left to disfigure and disgrace the American Men of Letters Series. Marcus Antoninus was indeed the putative father of that Commodus whose ear was deaf to the stirring "Meditations" that were written for his guidance; but we feel assured that Faustina corrupted the stream of gentle blood which came untainted from the heart of Annus Verus, and her son sustained the calumnies that without him would have perished. There is no baleful cloud to cast this dark shadow on John Thoreau's village home, and in that favored environment — of which it is written, "perpetuity, indeed, and hereditary transmission of everything that by nature and



THOREAU'S COVE AT WALDEN POND.

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good sense can be inherited, are amongst the characteristics of Concord" — the Thoreau children thrived and were a blessing to their home.

Such were the human sources of Thoreau's inheritance; enviable on both the spear side and the spindle; but most probably his ruling passion can be traced to one of them chiefly. A mother whom the woodland nymphs are surprised to see smitten with the throes of maternity while she is straying in their haunts, is likely by the rule of heredity to impress her deepest-rooted trait upon the son that most closely resembled her, and it is more than probable that Henry D. Thoreau's intense Nature-love caught its life-long fire from his mother's fervor; while the clear sanity of his genius is as distinctly attributable to the plain but solid virtues of his sire. The marriage of quiet John Thoreau and vivacious Cynthia Dunbar was a happy conjunction of diverse temperaments and opposite traits, of substantial virtues and of simple habits; and with bodies undefiled by luxury and minds unsophisticated by social dissimulation they made a home, and its lowly hearth became a shrine whose incense brought blessings to their offspring.

That impulse, the culminating momentum of which impelled Thoreau to seek the solitude of Walden, was a two-fold force: the mystery of Life pressing upon him for solution and the maternal love of Nature

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sending him to Nature with his burden. Of a certainty he was swayed more by instinct than reason; it was a sacred œstrus soliciting the marriage of Nature and Man's soul — better say the re-marriage, for in the golden age these two were one.

Thoreau says he does not know why he went to live in Walden woods and on looking back long after he had forsaken his shanty, he frankly acknowledges that he is equally at a loss to say why he left it. But whether in that sojourn he correctly settled the problem or not, he has left us in "Walden: or Life in the Woods," one of the most sanative books in all literature. This volume is equalled only by the example of his clean, pure life, which is like a winter morning, austere to the rebuking of all slothfulness; clear as the water of Life, serene as an Alpine summit and bracing as its atmosphere; and the lesson of his trustful death, which is like the setting of a summer sun ere yet the harvest time has fully come: there is still need for the ripening rays to longer linger, but still the ineffable glory of the fading effulgence has in it the Eternal's promise of another day.

Emerson once playfully called him "a sad pagan," and many, not Emersons, to this day deem him irreligious, and from the manner in which he flouted their false gods, even sacreligious. As Schiller says, "Against stupidity the gods themselves contend in

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vain." Take a retrospect of his life — the only "religion" that will "smell sweet and blossom in the dust" — and what are its gleaming mountain-tops? A sacred care for his body to keep it undefiled, and a sleepless vigilance to preserve unsullied the purity of his mind; an obedience to the Voice within fully as pious as the devotion of Socrates to his dæmon; a justification of the ways of God to man that makes a "back number" of all catechisms; a resignation to death that needed not the agony of Gethsemane.

Who can read unmoved that last letter of his, written at dictation and signed by proxy:

"I have not been engaged in any particular work on Botany" [Oh, the perfume of the young buds in the wind!] "though if I were to live, I should have much to report on Natural History generally.

"You ask particularly after my health. I suppose I have not many months to live; but, of course, I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing."

In the matter of "religion" it would appear that his began where so many are apt to fall away — at the yawning brink of a grave.

He kept the temple as divine
Wherein his soul abided;
He heard the Voice within the shrine
And followed as it guided;
He found no bane of bitter strife,
But laws of His designing;
He quaffed the brimming cup of Life
And went forth unrepining.

